**Thinking with Violence[[1]](#endnote-1)**

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Violence is the very stuff of history. Even ‘before the Trojan War and the death of Troy’, Lucretius tells us, ‘many other poets have sung of other wars’, and the attempt to understand violence and come to terms with it has always been integral to political thinking and philosophical enquiry. Whether it concerned interpersonal violence, collective violence or inter-state relations, investigating the phenomenon necessitated asking fundamental question and formulating answers about the most basic forms of human organization, such as the problem of civil living together, the nature of political sovereignty and the power of the state. Violence has provided the raw material for some of the profoundest meditations on humanity and its relationship to the divine: ‘is’t not perfect conscience to quit him with this arm? And is’t not to be damn’d to let this canker our nature come in further evil?’ ponders Hamlet.

It was only in the 1970s, however, that historians began to lower their sights from battlefield slaughter to everyday violence. One explanation for the neglect was that until then violence was a rhetorical rather than an analytical category, a problem that was always being tamed, overcome, or being consigned to the ‘other’.[[2]](#endnote-2) Since then thinking about violence has enabled us not only to re-evaluate the past, but also what it means to be human and works by historians, such as Natalie Davis, Jan Gross, and Christopher Browning rank as the most significant contributions to historical writing of the last generation. These and other historians used thick description and micro-analysis to place violence within its social and cultural context. In doing so, they questioned the received idea of violence as a drive that required taming or unleashing. The new approach was methodologically innovative and borrowed from social psychology and cultural anthropology. A consensus emerged in the historical profession that violence and our responses to it are shaped by emotions, ethical codes and social organization. Consequently, the level and nature of violence are subject to variation and sometimes very rapid change, sometimes for the better sometimes for the worse.

But beyond history this innovative vein of writing has had less influence. Instead, a new and influential orthodoxy has spread. This argues that the whole of human history until very recently was shockingly violent. Contrary to what we all believed the twentieth century was the most peaceful in history and we are presently living in an age of perpetual peace. When scaled for population size the sharp fall in the levels of violent deaths is self-evident and anyone who problematizes this ‘data’ is a ‘flat earther’, an enemy of reason, science and Enlightenment humanism.[[3]](#endnote-3) The explanation for the popular appeal and marketability of this absurd and morally dubious message is partly to be found in the rise Comfort History, which in our uncertain world, serves to remind us that life in the past was simply nasty, brutish and short.[[4]](#endnote-4) The new orthodoxy is the work of evolutionary psychologists, political scientists and theorists of international relations and is closely linked with the return of the idea of history, long since abandoned by historians, as a process of linear evolution.[[5]](#endnote-5) The marginality of historians to the current public debate on violence is significant. Histories of progress entail valuation; eschewing the context with which professional historians routinely deal in, the current orthodoxy employs contemporary values and standards with which to condemn the past. Since violence is always transgressive, historical research over the last generation has been dedicated to understanding how a society establishes the boundaries of legitimate and illegitimate violence, and how violence was represented and consumed.[[6]](#endnote-6) But the new orthodoxy is not concerned with this context. It sets out to prove that violence has been falling consistently and steadily throughout human history. It is not only leading to a serious misrepresentation of the past, but it has significant implications for the present: it reassures that the violence we witness today is a lesser evil – after all, we are being reminded, precision bombing, mass incarceration and water-boarding, are, historically speaking, not that bad. The new orthodoxy on the history of violence therefore amounts to a form of casuistry, which not only comforts but also serves political interests.

This essay argues that the current methodological chasm separating recent historical research and the Comfort History of violence has deeper origins. It demonstrates that, while historians have been open to innovation and eager adopters of scientific and social science research in order to transform our understanding of violence, many scientists and social scientists who use history to illustrate their theories are operating with an outmoded linear and determinist view of historical change. In order to repair the disconnection between historians, scientists and the social scientists working on violence, it is necessary to explore the roots of the present misunderstanding. The epistemological assumptions that have underpinned historical writing about violence have been shaped in large measure by history’s shifting engagement with the sciences. Current historical thinking emerged during the 1970s as a result of the disillusion and rejection of dominant social science and scientific models. In order to understand the new historical research and the synthesis that emerged we need to understand the roots of this disillusion. This article explores four patterns of History’s engagement with other disciplines, which I treat in rough chronological order: Psychology, Historical Sociology, Anthropology and Evolutionary Psychology. I conclude by showing what the possibilities are for a more open dialogue between historians and social scientists and scientists.

**Psychology**

Any history of the modern theory of violence must begin with Freud. Before Freud, theorizing about violence was largely confined to moral philosophy and therefore largely delineated by the taboos of custom, law, ethics and religion. Freud’s structural model of the psyche, in which children acquire a conscience (the supergo) by internalizing the injunctions of their parents’ ego, which in turn keep their biological impulses (the id) in check, brought science to bear on the matter for the first time. Freud’s theories validated nineteenth-century notions of history as a linear process. His thinking was most developed in *Civilization and its Discontents* published in 1929. Civilization is understood as humanity’s destiny, the result of the repression of biological instincts: ‘the inclination to aggression is an original, self-subsisting instinctual disposition in man...it constitutes the greatest impediment to civilization.’ For Freud, progress did not necessarily have a positive valence; he identified the internalization of drives as the cause of modern bourgeois neuroses. Though Freud’s juxtaposition between the ‘child-like nature’ of medieval man, who is the barbarian ‘other’ to our civilized ‘self’, the child to our man, was firmly embedded in nineteenth-century historical thinking, it is an idea that still retains immense influence today. For many thinkers the costs of the coercive and disciplinary efforts required by modern self-restraint are too high. For Michel Foucault, ‘the life and time of man are not by nature labour, but pleasure, restlessness, merry-making, rest, needs, accidents, desires, violent acts, robberies.’[[7]](#endnote-7) Following Nietzsche, he wishes us to recapture this Dionysian spirit and with regard to civility, presupposes that we have lost more than we have gained. Although, he effects to despise Foucault and post-modern thinking, the evolutionary psychologist Steven Pinker shares similar views of the past: for him medieval people are ‘impetuous, uninhibited, almost childlike.’ His Middle Ages are reducible to a cliché of robber barons, uncouth peasants and credulous fools. Unlike, Foucault, however, he does not see the positive valence in any of this: ‘The people of the Middle Ages were, in a word, gross.’[[8]](#endnote-8)

Freud’s theory was largely ahistorical, but it was given credence by one of the most influential works of history in the twentieth century, Johann Huizinga *Waning of the Middle Ages* (1919), which reinforced the chronological divide between medieval and modern, a divide that is cultural and mental rather than economic and social. Violence, and man’s attitude towards it, is crucial to this dichotomy; the *Waning of the Middle Ages* opens with ‘The Violent Tenor of Life.’ Huizinga identifies violence with the passions, to which medieval man is enslaved; a man of extremes he is quick to anger and insensitive to the misfortunes of others. The modern self is contrasted starkly with the medieval self: the rise of self-restraint is ineluctably tied to modernity and the advance of civilization is associated with the period that we now call the early modern. The *Waning of the Middle Ages* continues to exercise an enormous influence on popular understandings of the Middle Ages and remains a key point of reference for the Comfort History orthodoxy. What its imitators neglect is that Huizinga wrote the book before the First World War and modified his view quickly in the light of contemporary horrors. In *Homo Ludens* (1938) he explored the ways in which medieval violence was bounded by ritual.

Aside from reinforcing traditional chronological and temporal divisions, psychology’s other main effect in the early twentieth century was to focus historian’s attention on the behaviour of the crowd, the transformation of which by industry and urbanisation was seen as a one of the greatest challenges posed to modern society. Gustav Le Bon’s *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (1896) was the most influential study, viewing the rise of modern mass politics as part of the process of de-civilization: ‘History tells us, that from the moment when the moral forces on which civilization rested have lost their strength, its final dissolution is brought about by those unconscious and brutal crowds known, justifiably enough, as barbarians.’ For Le Bon, the masses are irrational and impulsive, the anti-thesis of civilized educated values: ‘Civilizations as yet have only been created by a small intellectual aristocracy, never by crowds. Crowds are only powerful for destruction…When the structure of a civilization is rotten, it is always the masses that bring about its downfall.’[[9]](#endnote-9) Much Postwar historical writing was dedicated to refuting this notion. In particular, the British School of Marxists promoted the writing of history from the crowd’s perspective, uncovering the logic of revolutionary violence and the hidden codes that ordered revolts and rebellions. But in spite of this, the notion that violence is essentially irrational, or beyond understanding, continues to be widely held. It haunts discussion of today’s religious violence. It haunts the debate about the Nazi terror, in particular, which is still routinely characterized as a debate over whether the violence was ‘rational’ or ‘irrational’, whether the Holocaust was the culmination of modernity’s alienation of the individual in a mass society characterised by technical and efficiency and bureaucratic organization, or whether it is a product of a Counter-Enlightenment quasi-religious utopianism. This polarization misses the point. It merely performs the trick of turning the perpetrators of mass killing into some human other. On the contrary, it is important to realise that the killing, however revolting to us, made sense to them and that conscience, faith and devotion, were very important to the perpetrators of the Holocaust, as they remain to us: ‘Devotion and faith [in Nazi ideology] did not make the Germans good, but they do make them human. Like everyone else, they had access to ethical thinking, even if their own was dreadfully misguided.’[[10]](#endnote-10)

**Historical Sociology**

It is axiomatic to the new orthodoxy that the state suppresses violence. Despite the horrors of the twentieth century, which suggest the opposite, the platitude that Leviathan is the most ‘consistent violence-reducer’ persists.[[11]](#endnote-11) This begs the questions what the state is and what sort of states can most effectively exercise social control without the need for extreme violence. Weber’s canonical definition in *Politics as a Vocation* (1919)that the state is a ‘human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory’ answers the first question. As for the second, read on and Weber tells us what this monopolizing force looks like: ‘everywhere the development of the modern state is initiated through the action of the prince’. As a Prussian born in the middle of the nineteenth century it should come as no surprise that he held an unshakeable faith that state power is a top down process and *Politics as a Vocation* evinces the widespread assumption in Germany that the only way out of the present crisis was to put faith in a charismatic *Führer*.

Weber died in 1920 and it fell to Norbert Elias to realise the sort of empirically-based historical sociology only sketched by his mentor. *Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation*, publishedin 1939 but only fully translated into English in 1992 as *The Civilizing* Process, claimed to delineate and explain the special and unique character of civilization: ‘By this term Western society seeks to describe what constitutes its special character and what it is proud of: the level of its technology, the nature of its manners, the development of its scientific knowledge or view of the world, and much more.’[[12]](#endnote-12) The idea that there was a *civilizing process* was developed out of nineteenth century historical idea of progress and firmly grounded in pre-First World War German sociological thinking. Elias was also influenced by Freud’s concept of human drives. For Elias violence is hydraulic; it is a driven by an *Angriffslust*, an innate drive that requires taming. Elias adapted Freud’s theory of psychic evolution by arguing that the human psyche is moulded by specific historical forces, such as social conflict, and political culture, such that each era of human social organization produced a body of manners, from medieval courtesy to the restraints on modern bourgeois man, that inhibited or controlled behaviour. Social constraints were gradually internalized over time and were absorbed into the subconscious, making control of the emotions and awareness of the boundaries of social etiquette second nature. He argued that the key stage in the civilizing process took place in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries with the transformation of the medieval knight into the courtier, the so-called ‘courtization’ of the warrior nobility. Repression of aggressive instincts is integral to the civilizing process and it is the princely court which acts as a model for society through its ability to impose rigid standards of behaviour on the aristocracy. Elias associated this process with state formation, since princely courts were arenas where new standards of behaviour were learnt and disseminated. Warriors were turned into courtiers; violent instincts were tamed and suppressed. The move from ‘expressive violence’, derived from passion, to ‘instrumental violence’, based on reason, is ineluctably tied to modernity and the rise of the West. As a refugee from Nazi Germany, Elias’s dialectical opposition of aristocratic French *civilité* to backward and provincial bourgeois German *Kultur* had a polemical purpose. It was at the court of Louis XIV that the civilization first began to take on the connotations that it enjoyed during the Enlightenment, denoting an ongoing historical process from barbarism towards a state of perfection through education and refinement.

The objections of Eurocentrism, Whiggishness and an exaggerated view of the reach of the state might may make the civilizing thesis seem passé, but it retains support among distinguished historians and scientists. The civilizing thesis also provides the theoretical underpinnings for the Comfort History of violence, for whom Elias is the only thinker worth knowing.[[13]](#endnote-13) Empirical support for the civilizing thesis, it is claimed, can to be found in the historical data on homicide rates, which are measured in terms of deaths per 100,000 inhabitants per annum. Rates may have been as high at 20 homicides per 100,000 in the late middle ages, dropping to around 10 in 1600 and ending in the historically lowest rate recorded of 1 per 100,000 in the mid-twentieth century. According to these figures, we moderns run only 5 per cent of the risk that our medieval forbears had of being murdered.[[14]](#endnote-14) Some clear patterns emerge from the data. First, interpersonal violence has declined significantly in the past six centuries with the fall possibly beginning as early as the fifteenth century, but with a well-documented decline from the eighteenth century. Second, there is little change in the long run in the age and sex of violent offenders. Homicide has historically been a masculine phenomenon: killers are overwhelming men and their victims overwhelmingly male. Societies with a high homicide rate are characterized by high rates of male-to-male violence, usually resulting from clashes over honour. Third, this fall was highly differentiated in its rate of decline between region and social class. North-Western Europe started its decline centuries before the process began in earnest in the Mediterranean. And the fall in lethal violence is disproportionately related to the decline in elite violence.

However, a distinction needs to be made between broad patterns of behaviour, which are subject to variation across time and a space, and a unilinear and unidirectional process. There are four main objections to the civilizing process: its weak theorization of the state; its faith in the belief that historical understanding is derived by simply plotting a mathematical chronology; its inability to count for regional variation and upswings in violence; the heuristic problems inherent in comparing vastly differing societies purely by scaling homicide rates in terms of population size. First, supporters of the civilizing thesis confuse violence with power. The ‘shock and awe’ of overwhelming force that the 2003 invasion of Iraq promised would build a new state proved to be illusory. The complicity of outmoded Weberian thinking in this folly is yet to be explored. But the failed state-building in Iraq taught us to pay more attention to Hannah Arendt’s critique of Weber. In *On Violence* she shows that power is the essence of government and that this rests on legitimacy. Violence is purely instrumental and does not guarantee an effectively organized state. It follows that states are built on consensus as well as force and that some states are more effective than others in controlling interpersonal violence. Two examples will illustrate the implications of this for the civilizing thesis. The early modern Dutch Republic was at the forefront of the decline in the European homicide rate.[[15]](#endnote-15) But the Dutch Republic was not a Leviathan; it was a decentralized polity which relied on a system of urban neighbourhood social control, which was already well established in the middle ages. What distinguished the Dutch Republic from its neighbours was not its state (its army, bureaucracy and tax system) but its vibrant and sophisticated civil society, that space between the family and the state, whose organisations and mechanisms exerted a powerful force for social control, preventing mundane disputes from turning violent.[[16]](#endnote-16) Absolutist France is the classic Leviathan and in Louis XIV Elias identified its charismatic *Führer*. What Elias and his followers failed to realise was that seventeenth-century France was considerably more violent than its neighbours and that the absolutist state was responsible for much of this.[[17]](#endnote-17) The state’s insatiable tax demands on a subsistence economy had catastrophic results. The village feuds caused by the venal and unfair tax system were probably a greater killer than the more observable peasant revolts.[[18]](#endnote-18) State violence weakened the legitimacy of the French monarchy and contributed to the chaos that Louis XIV confronted when he came to the throne. In fact, Louis XIV’s reassertion of authority was achieved less by repressing internal dissent and cowing a turbulent aristocracy, than by tempering the state’s excesses and offering the aristocracy a structured career in the largest army Europe had seen since Rome.

A strict mathematical chronology is crucial to the civilizing process, because the drives of uncouth medieval man require taming by the progressive forces of the state and civilized manners. But the graphs which are plotted from the statistics are misleading, because violence is subject to sharp and dramatic swings and significant regional variation, and the smoothing out of these into continental or global patterns merely produces a deceptive mirage effect of slow and predictable decline. The idea that homicide rates fell uniformly and consistently in the early modern period is wholly misleading, because the statistics hide the extreme levels of violence caused by civil war. In France, during the Wars of Religion (1562-98) and Germany during the Thirty Years War (1618-48) population loss may have been as much as 20% and 30% respectively. Rather than a steady and gradual decline homicide rates soared and then fell sharply during the early modern period. Across Europe, a parabola is discernible as violence increased from the middle of the sixteenth century, peaking in first half of the seventeenth century. This was followed by a very steep decline in the second half of the seventeenth. In England rates doubled or tripled between late 1570s and early 1620s and did not return to mid sixteenth century levels until last decade of seventeenth. The question as to why Europe emerged so rapidly in the second-half of the seventeenth-century from a previous half century of noble revolt, popular insurrection and civil war is fundamental, but one thing is certain: it was not due to an unconscious process.[[19]](#endnote-19)

The graphs produced to demonstrate the civilizing thesis flatten out the enormous regional variations in homicide rates. Most of the data comes from north-western Europe, but in 1600 only about 20 % of Europeans lived on its north-western fringes. Italy causes a particular problem for supporters of the civilizing process. Current evidence suggests that Italian homicide rates did not fall anywhere near as quickly as in the North. Around 1600 Italy had much higher rates of violence than elsewhere in Europe. At the time the homicide rate in England was 7 per 100,000 and that of Germany was 11, while the Italian rate was 47. In Bologna the homicide rate rose from 15 in 1620 peaked between 1630 and 1660, when it reached civil war levels at 61, before returning to 1620 levels in 1700. But early modern Italian states were certainly not characterized by a lesser overall level of state control. The inhabitants of Italian Renaissance cities were exposed to levels of social and economic interdependency far in advance of anything comparable in the North. It leaves supporters of the civilizing thesis puzzled for ‘whatever the deficiencies of early modern Italian states may have been they were certainly not characterized by a lesser overall level of state bureaucracy and judicial control than, for example, states in England or Sweden during the same period.’[[20]](#endnote-20)

But the biggest flaw in the civilizing thesis comes from the United States. The United is a civilized and advanced state, but it diverges from the Western European model. It has experienced consistently higher rates of homicide than other advanced Western states. Many theories have been put forward to explain American exceptionalism: poverty, guns, race, and even the fact that American men may just be meaner.[[21]](#endnote-21) But none of these theories are able to account for the sharp chronological fluctuations in the American homicide rate and the stark regional variations between individual states. What is clear from the American data is that contingent historical events have a long term impact, since they profoundly shape people’s attitude to the state, to society and to each other and this will have an effect on patterns of violence. The US homicide rate first diverged dramatically from that in Europe only in the 1840s as cleavages in society developed over slavery and the constitution. They have remained high in relation to Western Europe ever since. The political culture and social conflicts that arose out of Civil War and Reconstruction are having still having an impact on homicide rates today.[[22]](#endnote-22) The same reverberations of political upheaval can be traced elsewhere. Nineteenth-century France experienced very low rates of homicide, but this general pattern is deceptive because the rate spiked dramatically during the revolutionary events of 1830, 1848-51 and 1871. In Corsica, which was a long way from the centre of political upheaval, most of the increase was the result not of the political faction-fighting, but ‘ordinary’ common or garden murders. This demonstrates the impact that political upheaval can have on everyday social relations.[[23]](#endnote-23)

The supporters of the new orthodoxy see no heuristic problems in interpreting the homicide data. The facts speak for themselves: modern low rates of homicide are compared with very high rates in the past and these statistics are used to support the claim that our ancestors were quick they were to anger, caring little for the feelings of others. But comparative history is a useful tool of analysis only if we compare units that are similar enough to make the comparison meaningful. While it might be comforting for my medieval colleagues to know that fifteenth-century York was less than half as violent modern day St. Louis (which is currently the murder capital of the US with a homicide rate of 50), we can hardly draw meaningful conclusions from such a comparison. What we should like to know is why fifteenth-century York was also considerably less violent than the more economically advanced centre of European civilization that was Renaissance Florence.[[24]](#endnote-24) But in order to get a better understanding of what the figures mean it is worth pondering how the homicide rate is computed. That the medieval homicide rate was twenty times higher than our own (the current UK homicide rate is 1) is commonly used to show brutish they were when compared to us. How are these figures arrived at? Let us take a standard late-medieval town of 10,000, say York. In an average year two people are murdered. This translates to a homicide rate of 20 per 100,000, a very high rate by modern standards and probably a reasonable reflection of the situation at the end of the middle ages. With modern wound care, antisepsis, antibiotics, anaesthesia, fluid replacement, trauma surgery, and emergency services, three of every four homicide victims would probably survive today.[[25]](#endnote-25) But the regrettable homicide of two Yorkies in the late middle ages also needs to be placed in the context of an infant mortality rate which led to the deaths of between a quarter and a third of the city’s infants died before reaching their first birthday. The city was visited by at least four serious epidemics between 1485 and 1538 and further outbreaks of plague reduced the city’s population by one-third in the 1550s. Statistics alone cannot measure the impact of violence. The good citizen of medieval York knew that the natural world was a thousand times more life-threatening than their neighbour.

The other major problem of interpretation comes when there is an upswing in violence. This leaves the supporters of the civilizing thesis floundering. ‘The paradox is that the [French] Revolution reintroduced large-scale violence to a land in which, for more than a century, the “process of civilization” had made notable advances, radically reducing and circumscribing violence.’ This leaves Roger Chartier struggling for an explanation: ‘At the end of the eighteenth century, the civilizing process had not yet transformed all the inhabitants of the kingdom. The personality structure that instilled in individuals stable and rigorous mechanisms of self-restraint, substituting self-imposed prohibition and repression for exterior constraints was not yet universal.’[[26]](#endnote-26) This argument rests on the assumption that violence is a drive that requires taming. Comfort historians commonly ignore evidence that does not fit their model. The bizarre and repellent consequence of this is demonstrated by a recent general history which chooses to ignore the Holocaust altogether.[[27]](#endnote-27) Another trick is to invent a new theory, the so-called ‘de-civilization process’. It allows for the rising rates of homicide in the West during the 1960s to be explained by the permissive society, which, it is argued, caused a decline in manners and codes of behaviour, in which flouting propriety and etiquette, letting it all hang out, became de rigueur for the young.[[28]](#endnote-28) This kind of nonsense has no scientific basis, but echoes folk myths about declining moral standards. What supporters of the de-civilization process fail to add is that the increase in Western homicide rates ceased in the 1990s. In the UK the homicide rate halved in decade: with over 1000 homicides recorded in 2002-3 and 537 in 2013-14. Is this because we have become more buttoned-up, or more polite and mannered than generation x? I suggest we look for alternative explanations.

**Anthropology**

Perhaps the strongest critics of the civilizing thesis emerged in the discipline of anthropology.[[29]](#endnote-29) The foundations were laid by the anti-eurocentrist direction in anthropology from the 1930s. Anthropologists developed a radically different view of violence to historical sociologists and psychologists. Their field work showed how primitive societies developed social mechanisms for the control of violence and that self-control and propriety were highly prized. In the 1950s Max Gluckman’s work on Africa appeared in the newly founded history journal, *Past & Present*, which quickly established itself as the leading English-speaking historical journal through its championing of anthropology. From the 1970s the influence of anthropology led to a radical reinterpretation of our understanding of violence and society. Natalie Davis was one of the first historians to begin to take violence seriously as a category of analysis. Her ‘Rites of Violence’ (1973) has an assured place in the historical canon and is one of the most important contributions to the history of violence.[[30]](#endnote-30) It was a major contribution to the assault on social science structuralism. Afterwards, religion, violence or the crowd could no longer be reduced to a set of social and economic variables. Davis showed that patterns of ritual could be decoded to uncover the participants’ sense of a riot’s significance and validity. Culture Davis suggests is the driving force of historical change. This anthropological turn was not confined to the political Left. Another historian associated with *Past & Present*, but who identified with the Right, John Bossy, proposed in a seminal essay in 1983, ‘a social history which would be a history of actual people; a feeling that the record of law and especially litigation was a good place to find something about them; some experience in the history of social institutions of Christianity considered as peace-making rituals, and a wish to pursue the subject of arbitration and peace-making as an important matter in itself; and an interest in the theory of marriage represented in Romeo and Juliet’.[[31]](#endnote-31)

The main impact of the anthropological turn was to launch a ‘Copernician Revolution’ in our understanding of the law.[[32]](#endnote-32) The Italian *giustizia negoziata*, French *infrajudiciaire* and German *justiznutzung* are all concepts which focus attention on the consumption of justice and its role in underpinning social control. In turn, it has led to a re-conceptualization of the state - even Marxists would no longer claim that the law is merely an extension of the state. The law was used and manipulated by people and though this did not overcome enmity and anger, it kept them in bounds. Having one’s day in court was sufficient emotional satisfaction and the rule bound disputing process ensured that honour was publicly vindicated. The Ionian Islands are a good example of how rapidly the levels and nature of violence can change in a supposedly static and undeveloped rural society. High levels of interpersonal violence declined rapidly with the arrival of the British protectorate in the 1820s and its system of colonial criminal justice, a system that far from being coercive was cheap and accessible and proved to be remarkably popular among Greeks. The courts did not always work in the manner in which they were intended: in pre-industrial societies courts are annexes to the forum of honour where litigation had the purpose of vindicating honour; there reputation was on trial, not the truth. Nonetheless, courts help men to save face and satisfy honour without recourse to violence, and punishment supported the traditional roles of the priest, village elder and landowner as arbitrator. In the Ionian Islands the introduction of an efficient and accessible judicial system was in large measure responsible for the tumbling rates of assault, which dropped from an average 134 incidents per 100,000 in the first half of the nineteenth century to 27 in the 1880s.[[33]](#endnote-33)

The ‘Copernician Revolution’ has shown how the law promoted arbitration and reconciliation at every stage of the process. Beyond the courtroom there were all sorts of official and semi-official forums that brokered the peace. Most complaints never got to a definitive judgment and the public advertisement of one’s grievance followed by a handshake was usually sufficient to repair honour. In Holland each neighbourhood has its own *buurtmeester*, whose job was ‘to maintain, peace, amity and concord.’ In French-speaking parts of the Low Countries these were called *faiseurs de paix*. The Calvinist Consistory performed a similar role, one that the faithful welcomed more than its surveillance of morals. The practice of binding people over to keep the peace was ubiquitous: the English recognizance is similar to the German *Urfehde*, which literally meant ‘not feud’, a promise or an oath of caution by a defendant not to avenge himself on an enemy. The principle of *Taidigung* or reconciliation was a particular feature of German and Swiss courts in relation to disputes over honour. Some courts reinforced the customary practice of *Bier* or *Weinbußen*, fines which reconciled the wrongdoer because he paid it into communal pot, which would on a feast day provide a drink for friends and enemies alike, and by arranging special reconciliation days (*Bußplatzen*). Even the Paris police (established in 1667), which became the model for absolutist state control, spent a great deal of time reconciling neighbourly disputes, which meant that they had a multiple role as policeman, social worker, youth custody officer and family counsellor. The law was not simply an arm of the state, but an essential component of civil society, and contributed greatly to the pacification of society that eighteenth-century thinkers recognized when they reinvented the term ‘civilization’.[[34]](#endnote-34)

Crucial to the recent cultural anthropology of violence is that it is ‘perspectival’. According to David Riches, violence is ‘an act of physical hurt deemed legitimate by the performer and illegitimate by (some) witnesses’. Precisely because violence’s legitimacy is contestable it is opened up for debate, and so rhetorical strategies are employed that persuade people of its acceptability, and reduce chances of a reply in kind. For example, violence is often represented as self-defence, or as pre-emptive, or as a pay-back, getting even. As a result violence is a dynamic category that touches on questions of morality, the answers to which may make people change their views, or subvert their preconceived notions. Understanding the relations between performer, victim and witness will tell us a lot about the political and social environment within which the act occurs.[[35]](#endnote-35)

**Evolutionary Psychology**

This sort of micro-analysis has become extremely influential. It now carries the imprimatur of science. One of the most important recent studies of homicide is by the evolutionary psychologists Daly and Wilson.[[36]](#endnote-36) They sought to understand three problems posed by the historical homicide date: why, given the mythology that surrounds homicide as fratricidal, the killing of blood kin is in fact rare; why most victims and killers are men; and why, contrary to folk belief, most homicide occur between acquaintances - in the US 4 out of 5 homicides occur between people who have a prior relationship. What they concluded was that most homicides are the cause of trivial incidents. But for Daly and Wilson, the triviality of the cause is subjective. They argued that context was all important: reputation, face-facing, fears about social status and enduring relationships are for many men a matter of life and death. A large proportion of homicides traditionally dismissed as ‘trivial altercations’ have to be understood as the consequences of a ubiquitous competitive struggle for men for status and respect. Their study went against prevailing scientific theories which explained homicide in terms of pathology or a genetic predisposition, a claim which was resurrected by socio-biologists from the 1970s. On the contrary, most homicides can only be explained by the social and economic context in which they occur. The prioritizing of a micro-analysis of social relations, which anthropologists and historians had pioneered, seemed to have been vindicated by the behavioural sciences. Advances in social psychology also contributed greatly to explaining human motives for other forms of violence too. Christopher Browning’s *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (1992) was influenced by Stanley Milgram’s experiments of the 1970s, which showed that most people will adhere to commands when placed in a coherent group, even if they find the actions ethically reprehensible. Browning argued that the men of Unit 101, who were not largely ardent Nazis but ordinary middle-aged men of working-class background from Hamburg, killed out of a basic obedience to authority and peer pressure, not blood-lust or primal hatred. Browning suggests that all humans, even those who are not ideologically committed, have the potential to commit evil acts.

The most recent advances in neuroscience now endorse the view of the plasticity of the human mind and body and the power of historical circumstances to alter the physical, mental and behavioural qualities of individuals in ways that cannot be predicted or determined by genes alone. ‘Genes turned out to be wondrously more complex than previously imagined’ than the proponents of selfish gene theories and socio-biology in the 1970s.[[37]](#endnote-37) Humans are a species equally capable of doing good or evil. What makes humans’ brain different from other species is its remarkable ability to be flexible: aggression, spite, anger, conformity or generosity are not genetically controlled but depend on the context. Of course, this will come as no surprise to those working in the humanities. The human capacity to do either good or evil is something that philosophers, writers and dramatists have been exploring since the beginning of History. It was only the nineteenth century with the rise of biological theories based on drives that vengeance became an impediment to civilization, an animalistic impulse that required repressing.

It has recently been suggested that research coming from the ‘behavioural sciences constitutes the most important advance in the discipline of history since its first contact with demography and anthropology in the 1950s and 1960s’ and announces the emergence of post-cultural history.[[38]](#endnote-38) This will only be the case, however, if we learn from the mistakes of the past, from the misuse of mediocre science. Engaging with the behavioural sciences should not prevent us from continuing to distinguish between biological potential and biological determinism, between a brain capable of the full range of human behaviours and predisposed towards none and the concept that specific genes are responsible for specific behavioural traits. Unfortunately, the temptation is proving hard to resist. The idea taken from evolutionary psychology that we are simple survival machines, who elbow their competitors from finite resources and territory, in order that they can out-reproduce these competitors is simply another abstraction that will tell us nothing about the sharp rises and falls in the level of violence, or significant regional variations and its meanings. It is one thing to say that violence is, in many circumstances, rational and another to argue that this is driven by the male selfish gene.

To accept the existence of patterns of behaviour – for example the greater propensity of young men to kill than old women – is not to argue that human nature is immutable and unchanging. Evolutionary biology has moved on a lot since the 1970s and recent research suggests that the future fruitful possibilities for inter-disciplinary dialogue. Epigenetics is now showing how developmental circumstances can change the forms of gene expressions. The move away from a totally gene-centred view of evolution to include the capacity for organisms to modify natural selection in their environment is another fruitful area for interdisciplinary collaboration.[[39]](#endnote-39) Unfortunately, biological determinism, the ‘men are from Mars women are from Venus’ school of popular science writing, is far too deeply ingrained in our culture to be easily refuted. Popular science both perpetuates and profits from folk conceptions of human nature. Only this can explain the widespread acclaim and publicity accorded to Pinker’s *The Better Angels of Our Nature*, which argues that past is ‘shockingly’ violent and that we are presently living in an age of perpetual peace. Pinker is untroubled by the heuristic, moral and philosophical problems posed by comparing vastly contrasting societies across time. We have to assume that Pinker does not wish to leave us with the impression that the low homicide rates of 1930s Germany and Japan mean that they are non-violent societies, nor that, by employing the dubious methodology of scaling mass killing according to population size, the Holocaust was a relatively trivial occurrence in the grand scale of human history. Sadly, this is the impression left by his use statistics.[[40]](#endnote-40)

According to Pinker we are wired to violence. The mind is a complex system of cognitive and emotional faculties implemented in the brain which owe their basic design to the process of evolution. Some of these faculties incline us towards violence, others to peace. These predispositions are a result of the evolutionary process. This all seems fairly straightforward. The problem is one of interpretation. For Pinker, it means we can literally get into the minds of killers: neuroscientists have discovered the part of the brain that orbital region of the brain regulates argumentativeness, lack of concern for others, impulsivity, shallowness and even violence. Testosterone prepares men for competition, the implications of which are that ‘the problem of violence is a problem of young, unmarried men competing for dominance…violence is really the problem of there being too much testosterone in the world.’[[41]](#endnote-41) This logic of the argument is that American men have more testosterone than Europeans. It is based on weak science. High testosterone levels predispose men and women to a lot of things, but there is no strong correlation with violence.[[42]](#endnote-42) ‘Revenge is, quite literally [sic], an urge…The neurobiology of revenge begins with the Rage circuit in the midbrain hypothalamus-amygdala pathway which inclines an animal who has been hurt or frustrated to lash out.’[[43]](#endnote-43) There is nothing remotely new in this idea and merely repeats the assertion of Hegel, who passed it onto Freud, that revenge was an elemental force characteristic of ‘uncivilized peoples’. But there’s good news: we have a dimmer switch for revenge: several species of primate can kiss and make up after a fight. Human forgiveness is an instinct. This is most likely to occur when perpetrator and victim are bound by kinship, friendship, alliance of mutual dependency. Self-control is closely associated with civilizing process. Manners teach self-control, ‘which is like a muscle, so that you exercise it with table manners it will be stronger across the board and more effective when you have to stop yourself from killing the person who just insulted you.’[[44]](#endnote-44) The frontal lobes of the brain are most involved in self-control. They allow us to control impulses and delay self-gratification. Impulsive violence is a result of the malfunction of this part of the brain. People who commit crimes, Pinker claims, are those with the least self-control and can explain why the Middle Ages were an age marked by uncouthness, dissolute behaviour and above all violence. We have evolved since then and learned to control our impulses

These claims are based on outmoded Freudian ideas. They ignore the research which shows that killing is difficult and requires the killer to overcome significant psychological barriers to the taking of life.[[45]](#endnote-45) As a consequence, killing is more a matter of socialization and training than testosterone or brain-circuits. Bad science makes for bad history. The new code of civility which, it is claimed, was invented in the sixteenth century to control violence, did nothing of the sort. As we have seen, violence actually increased in Europe during the sixteenth and first half of the seventeenth century. The reason for this was precisely because of and not in spite of the elaboration of the new code of manners: every transgression or omission of the sign of respect that one was due was interpreted as an affront to be met with a response that repaired honour. This resulted in an explosion of violence over the point of honour.[[46]](#endnote-46) Hobbes, one of the heroes of Pinker’s story, detested the cult of etiquette for precisely this reason: ‘as how one should salute another, or how a man should wash his mouth, or pick his teeth before company, and such other points of the Small Moralls.’[[47]](#endnote-47) Hobbes solution to violence did not entail slavish attention to protocol or a repression of some primal urge, rather he envisaged a freer code of conduct that required putting up with others faults, yielding, cutting each other a bit of slack. This ethics, which he took from Montaigne, provided the foundation for the new civility that conquered Europe’s elite in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As the best evolutionary psychology has itself demonstrated interpersonal violence is best understood through the lens of social relations: students of violence will continue to have more need of Durkheim than Darwin.

Pinker’s irreverent style and ahistorical relativism - parodies of the postmodernism he professes to despise – might be deemed to be harmless. We might be prepared to forgive the wasting of twentieth-first century science in the service of nineteenth-century historical thinking, if there were not bigger issues at stake. The first problem with Comfort History relates to the use and abuse of history in contemporary culture. In the United States, in particular, with university humanities enrolments down, the liberal arts ideal under threat and pre-modern history provision being cut back to the bone, we are witnessing a telescoping of history, in which only the contemporary is valorised. But students should need to know why medieval York was much more peaceable than many modern American cities. The second danger of Comfort History is to nurture the belief that we are nearing an end to violence, for if violence is the stuff of history then we are close to the end of history itself, as many commentators have claimed. History suggests that we should always resist such utopian thinking. It is comforting to think that peace is an indubitably good thing and that today every sensible person has grown to abhor violence. But peace and justice are in tension. An absence of violence is not an indicator of a just society. High rates of violence in the past were often a result of feelings of injustice. The significant increase of collective violence in France after 1750 was not a sign of a de-civilizing process, but a growing revolt against a system that put social peace before social justice.[[48]](#endnote-48)

T**owards a new synthesis**

The horrors of the twentieth century made us wary of the claims made for ‘civilization’. After all, it was a key part of Nazi propaganda. As early as 1936 Hitler claimed to be standing up for European civilization against Judeo-Bolshevism and Nazi propaganda later justified the war in the East as a clash of civilizations. The widespread adoption of the word ‘culture’ in the wake of the Second World War was a reaction to the idea that history could be simply measured in terms of technical, mental and material progress. After 1945 historians turned their backs on grand historical narratives precisely because of the recognition that utopian thinking was responsible for the suffering and killing of millions. In the 1970s, in particular, the growth of interest in violence was due to the first stirring of public debate about the Holocaust and the recent exposure of Stalin’s crimes. Until then ideologically-driven violence had a positive valence, either on the Left or on the Right. The return of ‘civilization’ as an analytical category is also a consequence of contemporary concerns. Retooled for the Global Age, it is closely associated with the emergence of neo-liberalism. It is no coincidence that the new orthodoxy has gained ground since 2003 and the direct military intervention of the US and Britain in the Middle East. The new orthodoxy both reassures its audience and conveys the message that the ‘present peace’ is a triumph that requires defending. This sort of simplistic thinking will not provide us with a better understanding of violence and therefore how to deal with it. By way of conclusion, I will suggest five areas where the historian can help the social and behavioural sciences.

First, we must continue to pay attention to micro-analysis. Henry Kissinger got it wrong again when he said that ‘academic politics are so vicious because the stakes are so small’. For the triviality of the dispute is in the eye of the beholder. For Roger Gould interpersonal violence is the product of social relations and not persons. In this sense disputes are not about what they seem; they are about social relationships. Conflict will occur in relatively symmetrical relations in which there is ambiguity between actors concerning relative social rank and the meaningfulness of insinuations, accusations, and gestures of disrespect result from the social setting in which they are made: ‘when people come into conflict, the kind of relationship they have makes a difference for the outcome.’[[49]](#endnote-49)What restricts violence is not the deployment of a counterforce, but rather the capacity to bring to the fore modes of societal regulation based on the recognition of symbolic efficacy and the legitimacy of the political order. Violence requires social sanction and operates within a moral ambience and for these reasons the state is not the sole regulator of its boundaries. All kinds of everyday violence - squabbles over honour, wife-beating, masculine competition and rites of passage - are conducted according to socially agreed limits. Violence is rooted in feelings and beliefs and these are shaped by experience and the social environment and the boundaries of violence can shift rapidly. Murder is of particular significance because it is indicative of the distribution of conflict in society more generally. Its frequency has much to tell us about social relations, because murder is ‘emblematic of the less deadly but more frequent battles of will that occur in tens of thousands of comparable relations everyday’.This helps us explain the explosion of violence we see in the sixteenth century and the huge regional variations in violence that resulted. The transformation of the social elite, from an elite group of knights into a much more amorphous class of gentlemen, resulted in violence as old hierarchies collapsed and new social relations led to numerous squabbles over precedence and the signifiers of social ascendancy. Interpersonal violence is not therefore necessarily a signifier of backwardness but rather of social change.

Historians have rather blindly accepted assumed that the state suppresses interpersonal violence. A more fruitful way of looking at the problem is to focus on the manner in which states support civil society. Initially, most historical research in this area followed a Habermasian approach, analysing the concept of the public sphere within the realm of disinterested debate about the commonweal through the medium of voluntary associations, public meetings and the periodical press. This approach generally focussed on formally constituted organizations and associations that omitted the informal and real social relations that make up civil society. Getting a fix on these networks and skeins of relationship is difficult. The Copernician Revolution in our understanding of the law points to a possible way of getting at these. The delineation and control of property was a major part of social relations and conflict between neighbours. In all societies conflict arises over the free distribution of property, its acquisition and intergenerational transmission, and there is a whole sphere of cultural practices and representations that developed around it. Honour and behavioural expectations are linked to property and emotional conflicts arise over it. The law does not stop feuding between neighbours and kin, but it does have the potential to make it relatively bloodless.[[50]](#endnote-50) But what of those who do not own property? Despite the tremendous upheavals consequent on industrialization and urbanization, the homicide rate in England reached historically low levels by the 1880s of 1 per 100,000. This level of pacification can hardly all have been the result of internalizing repression from above, especially as the British liberal state largely lacked the mechanisms for policing and coercion available to its continental neighbours. Changes to English manliness were not ordained from above. English working-class life in the nineteenth century increasingly revolved around all sorts of associations, political, religious and recreational, that underpinned social relations and made hitting out and grabbing each other less necessary and less acceptable.[[51]](#endnote-51) English working class communities were characterized by skein of thick trust held to together by a rich associational life that reduced violence. Homicide rates increased from the 1970s as communities atrophied in the wake of de-industrialisation.

The relationship between people and their relationship to the state forms the basis of Randolph Roth’s four correlates governing homicide rates: the belief that government is stable and that its legal institutions are unbiased and will redress wrongs and protect lives and property; a feeling of trust in government and the officials who run it, and a belief in their legitimacy; patriotism, empathy and fellow feeling arising from racial, religious or political solidarity; the belief that the social hierarchy is legitimate, that one’s position in society is satisfactory and that one can command respect of others without resorting to violence. His research points to how emotions such as trust, honour and fear shape violence and why homicide rates in particular can rise and fall dramatically in a short space of time. The history of the emotions is likely to be a fruitful future field for further research and an area in which advances in the neuroscience will have a particular impact. Recent advances in cognitive psychology have questioned the neat distinction between the conscious and unconscious, controlled and involuntary processes. Emotions are not simply constructs, but how we feel about things does depend on the context in which they are felt and the ways in which we try to make sense of them.[[52]](#endnote-52)

One of the most serious weaknesses of the new orthodoxy is to ignore the enormous effect that the environment has on rates of violent death. This is well known to modern terror regimes which recognized that starvation was the most efficient means of eliminating enemies. In the more distant past there was a strong correlation between high mortality rates and violence, since many more deaths were the result of the disease and malnutrition that war brought in its wake. The link between the two is no longer inevitable thanks to modern medicine, humanitarian intervention and preserved food. But environmental disaster does not just increase morbidity through disease and malnutrition; it has an effect on social relations too. The boom in homicide rates in seventeenth-century Europe was exacerbated by the pernicious impact of disease epidemics and the ecological consequences of the Little Ice Age. In Bologna the homicide rate increased by a staggering nine-fold after the deadly plague of 1630-31, which killed 25% of the population. The shortage of labour shattered fragile trust: neighbours fought each over untilled plots and abandoned houses; landlords squabbled over workers and tried to prevent them leaving in search of better pay; families without breadwinners accused their enemies of spreading the disease; food shortages turned trivial disputes into matters of life and death. The violence that resulted was not ‘expressive’, but ‘instrumental’: as the legitimacy of the social order came into question people’s just sense of grievance boiled over and attacks on landlords and officials became more common.[[53]](#endnote-53) Given the fragility of the world’s ecosystem, this new historical research represents a timely warning against the complacency of Comfort History.

Finally, we will need to pay more attention to politics. Political violence’s close relationship with the sacred has long been recognized. For the religious fanatic, violence is a sacred performance, the ultimate validation of faith. But the transformative power of violence is not unique to religious ideologies. For both the revolutionary and the religious fanatic violence, terror and destruction are acts of creation. While leftist violence has lost its moral force, there is no reason to believe that nationalism has been overcome. But historians will need to go beyond ideology and events and pay more attention to the category of the political. The idea that enmity is the essence of the political was canonized by Carl Schmitt in *The Concept of the Political* (1928). The idea was not new and can be traced back to the middle ages. Enmity was a legal institution in the middle ages hedged by ritual, expectation and sanction. It was the Church that upheld the peace in the feud. This system was swept away by the Reformation. The upswing of violence that occurred in the sixteenth century was also a consequence of the transformation of the elite: during the Renaissance social and political capital was most easily earned by taking someone else’s honour. Violence rooted in the cult of individual honour was identified as a toxic social problem by thinkers from Montaigne to Hobbes. A new term, society, was invented in the seventeenth century as an antidote. The word changed from its original meaning of fellowship or company to an abstract entity. The new society was widely promoted in conduct books. As Pierre Nicole explained in his 1671 *Moral Essays* ‘those exterior troubles which divide Kingdoms, often rise from the little care particular persons whereof they are compose’d.’ And since it was ‘impossible that Men should live without being hated, they ought with extreme care to avoid incurring hatred by their imprudence and indiscretion… to the end we may maintain humane Society…every one should lend his helping hand, since then every-one reaps considerable advantages.’[[54]](#endnote-54)

Schmitt pursued a different logic. He separated private enmity from public enmity. His purpose in doing so was to relegate private sentiments to the lesser sphere in order to ennoble his higher concept of the public enemy: ‘an enemy exists only when, at least potentially, one fighting collectivity of people confronts a similar collectively. The enemy is solely the public enemy.’[[55]](#endnote-55) It is hard not to see this arbitrary separation as a form of casuistry, a cover for his private hatreds and rabid anti-Semitism. In fact, history suggests there is a close relation between public and private enmity. Private enmity is at the heart of faction, which partly explains the very high rates of interpersonal violence in Renaissance Italy. In the twentieth century totalitarian states encouraged the link between the two. Timothy Snyder has argued that local collaboration in the Holocaust in Eastern Europe was not the product of ideological anti-Semitism, nor a sign that these regions were more backward or primitive than Western Europe, where anti-Semitism just as widely entrenched.[[56]](#endnote-56) These claims merely replicate racial stereotyping and remove the possibility of individual agency. It was the Nazi destruction of state and society in Eastern Europe that created a special kind of politics, a world of scarcity and limited good in which the struggle to survive pitted neighbour against neighbour.

More recent events are reminding us of the ways in which civil war transforms the social environment. ‘For the many people who are not naturally bloodthirsty, civil war offers irresistible opportunities to harm everyday enemies.’[[57]](#endnote-57) During periods of civil conflict all forms of homicide will increase, such that politically-charged homicide will be matched by an increase in garden-variety domestic homicides and bar-room brawls. Individuals adopt the same hostile and predatory attitudes toward their neighbours that political partisans show toward their opponents. The good news is that enmity is more complex than Schmitt would have us believe. It is often grounded on a practical sense of injustice, a desire to get even, which is open to reason and reconciliation. It is why Montaigne referred to vengeance as a sweet passion. States, like religions, profit from this and are built on the capacity to arbitrate the peace in the feud.

1. The author would like to thank Dan Smail and Chris Renwick for commenting on earlier versions of this paper. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
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3. <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/mar/20/wars-john-gray-conflict-peace> (last accessed March 2016). [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. On Comfort History: M. Macmillan, *The Uses and Abuses of History* (London: Profile, 2009), chapter 2. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. J. Mueller, *Retreat from Doomsday: The Obsolescence of Major War* (1989); J. Goldstein, *Winning the War on War: the Decline of Armed Conflict Worldwide* (2011); S. Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: a History of Violence and Humanity* (2011). [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. For example: S. Carroll ed., *Cultures of Violence: Interpersonal Violence in Historical Perspective* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007); R. Bessel, *Violence: A Modern Obsession* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2015). [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Quoted in I. Burkitt, Social Selves: Theories of the Social Formation of Personality (London: Sage, 1991), 98. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. *Better* Angels, 69. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. *The Crowd*, 18. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. T. Synder, *Bloodlands : Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (London: Vintage, 2011), 324. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Pinker, *Better Angels*, 680. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. *The Civilizing Process* 2 vols., (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), i, 3. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Pinker, *Better Angels*, chapter 3. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. M. Eisner, ‘Long-Term Trends in Violent Crime’, *Crime and Justice: A Review of Research*, 30 (2003), 83-142. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. P. Spierenburg, ‘Faces of Violence: Homicide Trends and Cultural Meanings: Amsterdam, 1431-1816.’ *Journal of Social History* 27 (1994), 701-16. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. For the theoretical explication of social control: M. Dinges, ‘Justice als soziale kontrolle’ in Andreas Blauert and Gerd Schwerhoff eds. *Kriminalitätsgeschichte. Beiträge zur sozial- und Kulturgeschichte der Vormoderne* (Constance: Universitätsverlag Konstanz, 2000); and for local detail, H. Roodenburg and P. Spierenburg eds., *Social Control in Europe, 1500-1800* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2004). [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. S. Carroll, *Blood and Violence in Early Modern France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. S. Carroll, ‘Vendetta in the Seventeenth-Century Midi’, *Krypton. Identità, potere, rappresentazioni*, 5/6 (2015), 25-40. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. S. Carroll, ‘Violence, Civil Society and European Civilization, 1500-1800’, *The Cambridge History of Violence* 4 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), iii, forthcoming. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. Eisner, ‘Long-Term Historical Trends in Violent Crime,’ 128. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. Monkonnen, ‘Homicide: Explaining America's Exceptionalism’. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. R. Roth, *American Homicide* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009). [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. R. Gould, *Collision of Wills: How Ambiguity About Social Rank Breeds Conflict* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2003). [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. S. Carroll, ‘Revenge and Reconciliation in Early Modern Italy’, *Past & Present* 230 (2016), 101-42 [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. Roth, *American Homicide*, p. 12. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. R. Chartier, *The Cultural Origins of the French Revolution* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1991), 193-4. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. R. Muchembled, *A History of Violence* (London: Polity Press, 2012). [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. Pinker, *Better Angels*, 106-16. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. J. Goody, *The Theft of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), chapter 6. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. See the recent reassessment: G. Murdock, P. Roberts and A Spicer eds., ‘Ritual and Violence: Natalie Zemon Davis and Early Modern France’, *Past & Present: Supplement 7* (2012). [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. *Disputes and Settlements* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 287. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. The term is Alfred Soman’s: H. Piant, *Une justice ordinaire: justice civile et criminelle dans la prévôté royale de Vaucouleurs sous l'Ancien Régime* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2006), 208. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. T. Gallant, ‘Honor, Masculinity, and Ritual Knife-Fighting in Nineteenth-Century Greece’, *American Historical Review*, 105 (2000) 359-82. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. Carroll, ‘Civility, Violence, Civilization, 1500-1800’ [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
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36. M. Daly and M. Wilson, Homicide (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1988). [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. ‘Introduction’, ‘AHR Roundtable: History Meets Biology’, *American Historical Review* 119 (2014), 1492-9. [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. ‘The Decline of Violence in the West: From Cultural to Post-Cultural History’, *English Historical Review*,128 (2013), 367-400. [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. With thanks to Dan Smail for clarifying this point. [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. *Better Angels*, 195, ranks the ‘worst things people have done to each other’ without drawing to our attention that the Second World War ranked ninth (55 million deaths) lasted six years and the Mid-East slave trade ranked third (estimated 19 million deaths, but scaled up by Pinker to 132 million to give a mid-twentieth century equivalent) took place over more than a millennium. [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
41. *Better Angels*, 519. [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
42. C. Mims, ‘Strange but true: testosterone alone does not cause violence’, *Scientific American*, July 2007: https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/strange-but-true-testosterone-alone-doesnt-cause-violence/ (accessed January 2017). [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
43. *Better Angels,* 530. [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
44. Ibid., 73. [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
45. D. Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Costs of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (New York: E-Rights digital edition 2009), section 3, chapter 1. [↑](#endnote-ref-45)
46. Carroll, Civility, Violence, Civilization, 1500-1800’ [↑](#endnote-ref-46)
47. *Leviathan*, ed. R. Tuck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 69. [↑](#endnote-ref-47)
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49. Gould, *Collision of Wills*, 97. [↑](#endnote-ref-49)
50. J. Sperber, *Property and Civil Society in South-Western Germany, 1820-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press., 2005). [↑](#endnote-ref-50)
51. Carroll, ‘Introduction’, *Cultures of Violence*. [↑](#endnote-ref-51)
52. William Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling a Framework for the History Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). [↑](#endnote-ref-52)
53. Rose, ‘Homicide in North Italy: Bologna, 1600-1700’ [↑](#endnote-ref-53)
54. Pierre Nicole, *Moral Essays* (London, 1677), p. 238. [↑](#endnote-ref-54)
55. Jan-Werner Müller, *A dangerous mind: Carl Schmitt in post-war European thought* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 32. [↑](#endnote-ref-55)
56. T. Snyder, *Black Earth: the Holocaust as History and Warning* (London: Vintage, 2015), especially p. 150. [↑](#endnote-ref-56)
57. Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 389 [↑](#endnote-ref-57)